SEMINAR ON PROSPECTS AND POTENTIAL OF BPOs IN PAKISTAN

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A seminar on the " Prospects and Potentials of BPOs in Pakistan" was organized in March 2006 by the College of Management Sciences, PAF-KIET. The theme of the seminar was human resources management strategies within the industry. The chief guest was Noman Saigal, Advisor to CM Sindh on IT. The cosponsors for the seminar were National Bank of Pakistan and Habib Bank Limited.

Major players such as TRG, ALT Source Communications, C3 Private Limited, Mind Tree Consultants, and Every Day Communications participated in the seminar.

The seminar had three sessions. The inaugural session comprised of recitation from the holy Quran, welcome address by the President PAF-KIET and a presentation by Abdullah Butt, the president of the Association of Call Center Operators. In the subsequent sessions students and faculty members of PAF-KIET, and BPO experts and executives read four papers. Stalls were set up by the participating companies for interviewing the students for employment.

The abstracts of the papers read by the students, faculty members and the experts of the industry are presented below:

Abdullah Butt, the President of the Association of Call Center Operators (ACCO) read a paper on "Problems faced by Call centers in Pakistan". He informed the audience that business outsource processing has huge potential for earning foreign exchange and

developing a strong image for the country. He was also of the opinion that government support is necessary for tapping into these opportunities. He observed that the recent disconnectivity of fiber optics adversely affected the industry image and also resulted in the closure of several call centers. BPO business in Pakistan is at the initial stage of development therefore the companies are not facing major difficulty in acquiring human resources with technical skills. He concluded his paper by stating that the government needs to coordinate with BPOs and business schools for developing a curriculum that is specific to the requirements of the industry.

Muhammad Waseem Khan a student of the College of Management Sciences PAF-KIET presented a paper on case studies of successful Indian BPOs. This involved a detailed analysis of the top three Indian BPO firms. Mr. Waseem's focus was on the strategies that have been adopted by individual firms to become the leading BPOs of India. The paper concluded with speculation about what Pakistani BPOs could learn from the Indian experience.

Sulaiman Farooqi, the chief executive of C-3 gave a presentation on "Prospects and Potentials of Outsourcing in Pakistani Service Industry" Mr. Farooqi informed the audience that BPOs in Pakistan are at a development stage. The market size of the industry is more than $57 billionworld wide and the market share of Pakistan is extremely small.   Mr. Farooq observed that the customers of the BPO business are from countries such as Canada and the USA therefore the employees while interacting with them have to be fluent in English, and require a clear neutral accent and exposure to the cultural norms and values of those societies. Another aspect on which he deliberated was the technical skills required by the BPO industry. He was of the opinion that Pakistan may have several advantages over India specially with reference to the availability of neutral English speaking professionals.

Anwar Kazi, a founding member and CEO AltSource Communications deliberated on "Quality Management of BPOs in Pakistan". Mr. Kazi observed that the outsourcing business has been gaining popularity in the United States. He was of the opinion that the companies that are looking for outsourcing their business to third party service providers are literally placing their fate in the hands of local BPOs. These BPOs should have a high quality management system in order to have a long-term relationship with their clients. Mr. Kazi highlighted the need for quality assurance standards, which are means for assessing the efficiency of business processes. The speaker presented a set of quantifiable benchmarks.

Arif Ifranullah, the chief executive o f MindTree spoke on "Image of Pakistani BPOs Abroad". Mr. Ifranullah observed that India is a big name in IT business as well as in BPO business. Mr. Irafanuallah pointed out that the reason India has a positive reputation is that the country itself is large and over a period of time has created an image by performing and delivering reasonables good service at a comparatively low price. He observed that Pakistan on the other hand had a late start in the IT/BPO business. It has made nominal inroads in the IT/BPO global market. It has to go a long way to develop a good image. He was also of the opinion that the recent damage to fiber optics in Pakistan had adversely affected the reputation and image of the local BPOs. He observed that like

India Pakistan should also have a backup arrangement of connectivity otherwise foreign companies would be reluctant to do business with Pakistani BPOs. He concluded his presentation by giving suggestions on how to improve the reputation and image of local BPOs.

Raza Kamal, Director of the College of Management Sciences PAF-KIET and Tariq Jalees of PAF-KIET presented a paper on "HR and Needs and Requirements of BPOs". This was based on a survey which was undertaken to develop insights on how a BPO firm should develop HR policies in order to gain an edge in this industry. The paper identified critical factors, such as human resource planning, retention of employees, building career paths, training and development and wages and incentives as crucial elements of the BPO HRM process. The paper gave a holistic view of the HR functions of the BPO firms with focus on human resource planning. The paper also deliberated on the demand and supply aspects of human resources. The paper highlighted the survey findings, which were that the turnover of the employees in BPO was quite high. Therefore the paper suggested measures for improving the turnover rate, and identified strategies for retaining employees. It advocated flexi timings for students, review of the eight hours shift and enrichment of job descriptions. Moreover, it suggested implementing vertical career structures, which could be made attractive by designating call agents, team leaders, floor managers and business managers. It also recommended vertical and horizontal movement of employees based on performance. It identified required competencies at each level of the career path. To make the training viable it proposed that foreign trainers should be used as resource persons, who should provide pre-job training to the new entrants and potential employees of the industry. This training should focus on the development & language skills – clarity of expression, confidence and power of persuasion and customer orientation.

Bernard Bendiet a representative of Kotanct Remote Services Pvt. Ltd. read a paper on "An overview of high value business outsourcing" Mr. Bendiet said that BPO business is not restricted to the activities related to the call centers. Mr. Bendiet dwelt upon the prospects and potentials of medical transcriptions, automated billing, web enabled software solutions, multi channel customer contact centers, customers relationship management, data research and financial services.

A resolution was presented for adoption by Mr. Tariq Jalees, Assistant Professor PAF_KIET. It was unanimously adopted. The resolution stated: "This meeting resolves to establish an institutional focus for enhancing the national development contribution of business process organizations in Pakistan. The meeting proposes the establishment of a steering committee consisting of representatives of BPOs and business universities to identify policies and programs for the growth of the domestic and export market for BPOs and development of an effective human resource management strategy to enhance BPO organizational efficiency".

It urged the government and the corporate sector to urgently consider the establishment of an IT Park in the Korangi Area.

It requested BPOs and business schools to pool training resources and to develop schemes for enhancing security and the prevention of fraud and malpractices in IT business.

It urged business schools to develop a framework for assisting BPOs in the area of training, marketing, and organizational restructuring.